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Advances in the Treatment and Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease

✖ Alzheimer's disease was first identified more than 100 years ago and currently affects over 5.4 million people. However, it's been the past 30 years that have been instrumental in generating research findings that can help unlock this debilitating disease. Advances in our knowledge of the biology of Alzheimer's disease have provided important insights about preventive measures, the earliest possible stages of diagnosis and the best approaches available for treatment. This is why The Wien Center for Alzheimer's Disease and Memory Disorders at Mount Sinai Medical Center remains

committed to the advancement and development of new diagnostic tools and treatment options for Alzheimer's disease through active participation in clinical research trials.

When Alzheimer's disease progresses to the point where symptoms manifest, areas of the brain become affected resulting in impairment of language, sensory perception, judgment, manual skills and emotional control. However, improvements in clinical assessment and brain imaging have enabled clinicians to diagnose Alzheimer's more reliably and at an earlier stage which can result in immediate medical intervention. The earliest abnormality in the brain in Alzheimer's disease is the abnormal deposition of a protein called beta-amyloid, whose amounts tend to increase with age, but especially in those who will ultimately develop Alzheimer's disease. Very recently it has become possible to detect the presence and amount of amyloid in the brain, using a new type of PET scan. Shrinkage or atrophy of the hippocampus and neighboring brain structures, which are intimately involved with learning and memory, are also visible and measurable on MRI scans of the brain. Atrophy of these brain regions are associated with impairment of memory, which can now also be detected at a very early stage with specific cognitive tests. As a result, these tests are now being used to diagnose Alzheimer's, even before there are any symptoms, especially among those with major genetic or other risk factors for the disease.

Being able to identify pre-symptomatic features of Alzheimer's disease means we can begin to treat the disease early. Such therapies are likely to be more effective when there is less pathology and secondary problems. Many disease-modifying approaches to treating Alzheimer's disease are currently under intense investigation, especially those targeting the overproduction of amyloid, its removal from the brain (by vaccines) or prevention of its toxic effects. Non-amyloid treatments targeting other proteins involved in Alzheimer's, such as tau-protein, are also being devised and tested.

Not all individuals with these early markers of the disease will actually develop the typical symptoms and progression of

Alzheimer's disease. However, genetic and medical risk factors such as uncontrolled high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, diabetes, cigarette smoking, chronic infections and inflammations can increase the likelihood of development. Managing of these risk factors coupled with regular physical and mental exercise, a healthy diet, stress reduction and frequent social interactions can provide individuals with a window of opportunity, of as much as two decades, to prevent or substantially delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

With an annual patient load of approximately 500 new patients, 2,000 follow-up patients and over 20 active clinical trials and research projects, The Wien Center is undoubtedly one of the most active centers, nationally, devoted to the diagnosis and care of patients with memory disorders. The Wien Center utilizes the most advanced cognitive and diagnostic tests, and disease-modifying agents available in an effort to treat Alzheimer's disease at the earliest stage possible. In addition, The Wien Center also hosts the annual Mild Cognitive Impairment Symposium – an international forum that attracts top doctors from all over the world to discuss the latest in diagnosis and treatment of the earliest forms of Alzheimer's. The Wien Center has also managed and operated The State of Florida Brain Bank since its inception in 1985. By focusing on research and advancements in technology, we aim to improve memory and mental responsiveness in Alzheimer's patients, educate the community on healthy aging, delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and, ultimately, find a cure.

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